

WAKE

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	2
DEDICATION.....	3
INTRODUCTION: Creating From the Ground Up.....	4
CHAPTER ONE: Why Wake?	7
CHAPTER TWO: Confronting the Challenge	12
Section 2.1: Reflection on Training in Columbia	12
Section 2.2 : Challenges to My Skills, Reaching to My Limits	14
CHAPTER THREE: Indepth Preparations	16
Section 3.1: Understandings and Representations	166
Section 3.2: Inventing the World of the Work	216
Section 3.3: Constructing Events/ Inventing Characters: Roles and Relationships	162
Section 3.4: The Team – Selection and Collaboration	47
CHAPTER FOUR: How Audiences Relate to the Work	61
CONCLUSION:.....	644
APPENDIX Wake Theatre Website	66
BIBLIOGRAPHY Wake Sources.....	71

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Operator/VJ: Gil Williams Sound Engineer: Eric Sluyter Assistant Stage Managers: Kate

Dial & Garrett Rollins Assistant Director: Monica Santana Producer & General Manager:

Mariana Ortiz Company Manager: Yue Lin

Most of all, my parents Bob and Lan Teo, who never let me forget what's most important.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to Haley and Richie Wesley and their family,
for trusting me with their story.

INTRODUCTION:

Creating From the Ground Up

"The hero Perseus undertook to cut off the head of the Gorgon Medusa, half human, half monster, and so hideous that all living creatures turned to stone at the sight of her. Athene lent the hero her shining bronze shield, and Hermes his winged sandals and his curved sword. Perseus sought out the Gorgon, and found her sleeping. Holding her reflected image steady in the shield he carried on his left arm, he struck her head from her shoulders. Even in death the head retained its power to petrify."

Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, Book IV

Ovid's words preface Australian anthropologist Inga Clendinnen's "Reading the Holocaust" (1991), a book that has been an indispensable guide in my work and life as a theatre director. In it, she likens the barriers to discourse on the Holocaust to the Gorgon effect: the sheer immensity of atrocity leads one to freeze into stone, thus causing a continual dismissal of the genocide as pure evil and distribution of blame against anyone who took any action to further the Nazi's cause. She wishes to dispel the Gorgon effect, describing it as "the sickening of imagination and curiosity and the draining of the will which afflicts so many of us". Clendinnen believes that "this is not a matter of arriving at some 'Aha! Now I comprehend everything! theory or moment.'" Instead, she promotes a

systematic investigation of the situation at hand for all those involved at every level - from SS officers, to the Jews who were forced to build the very chambers that would extinguish their people. Only through clear analysis of what each party was subject to, can we have a clearer understanding of how the unthinkable was carried out. She writes that "the understanding I seek comes from framing sufficiently precise questions to be able to see exactly what is before us, whether person or processes. It is both cumulative, and never complete." Her methods hold the mirror up so we are able to understand the inner workings of great atrocity and in so doing, have a glimmer of a chance to break out of history repeating itself.

The techniques and principles of inquiry she employs in this detailed study of the Holocaust have been critical in my work as a documentary theatre maker. These include: beginning without an answer, the systematic gathering of information that is thorough and unbiased, treating each subject with objectivity, a rigorous process of analysis, and ending possibly with more questions. The premise of her book has also informed the way I choose content. Making theatre from a real event allows one to directly address an issue and community, and the more complex and thorny the event is, the more compelling the need to make work about it. I have found that necessary and compelling content arises from events that render one speechless. It often means that the aftermath or consequences of this event has left great disturbances in the fabric of the society. It means that we should indeed speak about it, for doing so holds up the mirror instead of allowing it to remain hidden. Events too difficult to talk about have the spell of the Gorgon effect - which lends to great potential for the space of theatre - because when one cannot speak

anymore, there might be a great well of image and sound that is trapped inside. Perhaps Buddhist liturgy describes it best, calling for us to "dispel the darkness of ignorance" in order that we "may ascend to the throne of enlightenment and accomplish the way together." (Zen Garland Sutra, p.11)

This thesis deals with the process of making WAKE, a new music theatre work from the ground up- a process that began for me seven years ago, with an unutterably horrific event. In these pages, I hope to articulate the process of making a work that was derived from a real event and the way that those facts of a story became a theatrical event that encompassed the vision of the whole team. This piece was created in a very short time, a little over two and a half months from initial concept to performance. The process itself, however, goes back many years, and I have included much of this background because it has been of utmost importance in making this work. It was thus my encounter with a most horrific unspeakable event in Angwin, California, seven years ago, that compelled me to decide to form and direct a new work, creating from the ground up, in order to tap the deep well of pain and emotions that threatened to haunt the subconscious of a whole community.

CHAPTER ONE:

Why Wake?

*Definition 1: **Wake** [weyk], n*
The aftermath or consequence of an event.
A trail of disturbed water or air.

In 2007, a tragic event occurred in a small community in Angwin, Napa Valley, that indeed rendered many speechless in shock and horror, and its aftermath is still felt today. Here is the report in the Napa Valley Register (Dorgan, 2007):

"The tragic chain of events started the morning of May 18, when Haley Wesley, along with Maddison, drove to Napa from their home on College Avenue in Angwin to visit a friend. Realizing she was going to be late for work, Wesley and the baby left Napa and drove to Angwin. Forgetting the baby was in the back seat, Wesley parked her car at the parking lot where she works around 9 a.m. She did not return to the car until 3 p.m., at that time she drove home. When she arrived at the residence she found her daughter unresponsive still strapped in the car seat. Wesley brought the baby inside the house where she administered CPR. Medics were called and Maddison was taken to St. Helena Hospital where she was pronounced dead."



Haley Wesley

The idyllic town of Angwin, California has a population of just over 3000 and is home to Pacific Union College (PUC), a Seventh Day Adventist institution that employs many of Angwin's residents, including Haley Wesley. I was educated there for my undergraduate degree and then invited back to start and helm the drama program. I lived and worked for 10 years in that community. It is a town where everyone knows everyone else, and families live in the same houses for generations. There is no place to hide or escape.

Maddison's death shook the community. Haley and Richie Wesley were from families from the area and having been educated through the Seventh Day Adventist system, were known by the faculty and community. Their friends had been educated by Haley's father (he was the principal and taught religion classes in the local private middle school.) Haley's sister, Heather, was the high school drama teacher and an actor in many of my productions. Many in the community had played football with Richie on the

weekends, and most everyone had been photographed by Haley, the official photographer and graphic designer for PUC.

My involvement in this began by my comforting Haley, and supporting Heather, her sister, through the grieving of her niece's death. We were preparing to go on tour with *Red Books: Our Search for Ellen White*, a documentary theatre work, and Heather would come to rehearsal an emotional wreck. I watched all of this through the eyes of a sister's unconditional love. Several years ago, Haley and I had a conversation about her desire to share her story in order to hopefully prevent this from happening again. I suggested a documentary film format, and to my surprise, she agreed. I provided all the reasons why she shouldn't - e.g. having to relive that day through the interview process, letting a film crew into their home will be invasive, and dragging all their family and friends through it again. She replied with all the reasons why she should. This gave me the confidence and trust to take on this difficult story - I would not have done it without her fully on board. Later, before making *Wake*, I asked her again for her permission, which she graciously granted.

My filmmaking partner Carol Ho and I then have spent the last five years making a feature documentary on Haley entitled *Stop All The Clocks*, referencing the opening line of Auden's *Funeral Blues*. It came from what Haley expressed in her first interview: that when she realized what she had done - "time stopped and nothing would ever matter again" (SATC). In the closing lines of his poem, Auden mirrors the same sentiment:

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;

Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;

Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.

For nothing now can ever come to any good.

This brings me to the reason why I chose to revisit this story for my MFA thesis. I had earlier planned on making another piece for my thesis, *Go On Living*, an adaptation of exiled Chinese poet Liao Yiwu's prison memoir and was developing it with writer Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig in the fall of 2013 in California. My materials project on Liao Yiwu's Paris Review essay *19 Days*, an immersive installation, was made as a way to research for *Go On Living*. In addition, I have been working in China doing documentary theatre with university students, factory workers, and rural villagers. There are many subjects that I would not be allowed to stage there, and I felt strongly that I could not waste an opportunity to do so, having the privilege of being able to create work in the U.S. We had a Rough Reading workshop co-produced by the Bay Area Playwrights Foundation, UC Berkeley, and Stanford to develop the piece with professional actors. When we came to the end of that workshop in November, we knew that it was a solid shape of Act 1. But then, because of her schedule and Chinese New Year, Frances could not be at rehearsals, and could only arrive in NYC for tech week. At that point, we realized that it wouldn't serve the play, or either of us to produce in NYC in March 2014, and I was given the opportunity to decide what to do instead, and very quickly.

I consider this an opportunity because I am very grateful for the chance to be forced back to the drawing board. It made me reformulate the process of choosing, something I have been very fortunate to have in my control in my life as director and educator. As the resident artist at PUC for 7 years, I was given, more or less, total freedom in choosing the plays that I would work on with the students. I started my term there by staging Shakespeare, Moliere, and Wilder, and discovered to my disappointment that the work didn't quite reach a level that I would consider significant or a necessity, largely due to lack of vision on my part to stage classics, and inadequate training of the performers in a brand new department. After 3 years, I decided to make original documentary theatre work about the prophet of the church, Ellen White. This production changed dramatically the way I think about theatre and its capability to affect and heal the community. After that show, I was able to create other pieces that addressed the issues of that community, e.g. fundamentalism, limited ideas of the divine, and the difficulty of finding truth in history.

When I came to NYC however, I realized that deciding the why and what was much more difficult in a city that firstly, didn't feel like a community, and that was much more liberal than the environments I was used to. Having predominantly chosen my work in a small, cloistered community, these three years at Columbia has been a necessary and vastly different space to recalibrate my "why". I have asked myself: how do I continue to make work that is relevant and resonant to the viewer? How do I get to know my audience here, a transient city that the world passes through? How do I even begin to evaluate the parameters of content and form?

CHAPTER TWO:

Confronting the Challenge

In addition to the challenge posed by the NYC environ, there is the obvious issue of turning out, from scratch, a creative work, involving recruiting and mobilizing a divergent team of individuals to generate new themes, and events, and scapes, in a short time. It would draw on all the training I had in Columbia, and tax the limits of my skills.

Section 2.1: Reflection on Training in Columbia

In having this opportunity to start again, I have realized the differences my training in Columbia has made in how and why I make work. One of the first parameters was who to work with - Columbia's pedagogy of staging work incredibly fast and often really trains us to learn that casting people with high levels of skill, who are game and willing to throw themselves into the process, is of utmost importance. I have come to hold performers as highly and indispensable as playwrights are usually treated. I find that American theatre tends to treat performers as exchangeable, and now, in some quarters, even cast without auditions. I am very grateful for all the performers who have been in each project with me through my three years, for they have taught me so much. The first thing I did at the drawing board was to ask myself who I wanted to work with in New York City. Marnie Breckenridge was the first person who came to mind. We have talked

about doing something together, and when she said yes, I knew that I have found the first key to the puzzle.

Another lesson from Columbia's training was knowing that despite the importance of working fast, the work suffers unless the thinking or research has already been there and simmering. I knew that whatever I worked on with Marnie had to be something that I already had a history with - be it theme or play or subject matter. I did not know immediately what that was, so I began with asking myself what was the deepest question I had. It was at a silent meditation retreat, an incredible place and situation to interrogate myself. When I found that it was the question of how to forgive myself. Though I find it relatively easy to forgive another, I blame and punish myself ceaselessly for small matters - be it saying something rude to a friend, or being callous and unthoughtful, or realizing my ego. I wondered if I looked more closely at a story of someone who had committed an act that seems unforgiveable by societal standards, I could understand this process more.

Haley's situation came to mind immediately, and I realized that we never looked into the period of the four months after Maddison died. Haley disappeared to her home town in Hawaii, and after that time, returned to the same job, same husband, house and community. I began to think about these months as the dark night of the soul, which could have felt like four years, four lifetimes or four seconds. Whatever happened in that time, whatever self-torture and blame she might have inflicted on herself, whatever grieving process she found necessary, it allowed her to return to the land of the living. I started to visualize the world of the play - huge landscapes of forest, desert, underwater

that overwhelm the fragility of the body. I saw a white porcelain bathtub in a vast desert, a blizzard in the air. I knew that this would be about the process of surviving impossible guilt and self-blame through a surreal theatrical space, and would allow me to cover much more new ground than we did in the film.

Section 2.2: Challenges to My Skills, Reaching to My Limits

As much as I tried to think of a currently existing play to direct, at that moment, I knew deep down that working from the ground up and creating new work would be the way forward. As a deviser, there's a level of ownership for all of the artists involved in a new piece that I've not yet experienced in staging plays. That investment and ownership have been most fulfilling for me - to artistically conceive and lead a new collaboration, despite its difficulties and the continual looming threat of failure.

Conceiving and developing a new production from beginning to end not only required the skills of directing, but also creating the structure of the world of the play itself – in fact it requires making everything from the ground up. To begin anew always feels groundless and limitless, and requires a continual search for the secret foundation of the play to realize the whole. This secret foundation is the underlying principle of everything the production will be based on - the moral, philosophical structure of the world in which the play is built. In plays that are already written, directing for me is the uncovering of the secret foundation through research, study, and the process of making decisions in rehearsal. When devising new work, it is the same uncovering, only deeper and wider, reaching into the consciousness of all the collaborators, as we weave together

the divergent beliefs and value systems of the team into actual theatrical decisions for the stage. Sometimes, it is not revealed until much later in the process, as it can come from a deep place of the unconscious. In *Wake*, it is this process that was most important in honing and developing. This is the key for me in being a theatre artist - that we can create from a collective consciousness.

I care about making work that challenges my directorial skills and abilities to the point where it feels impossible. I also believe in making work that requires everything I've done before, and knew that I wanted my thesis production to be ambitious enough that it would require the culmination of time at Columbia and everything I've done up to this point. Working with Marnie, a professional opera singer of the highest caliber, on a new music theatre piece about Haley's unbelievable story seemed like an epic challenge. What sustained me through the project was the involvement of my Pacific Union College community which has raised me with love and generous support. And my training at Columbia for many of the reasons for my choice of production, but mostly, for endowing me with the gift of being fearless of failure, and thus, the courage to experiment and innovate beyond my own limited abilities.

CHAPTER THREE:

Indepth Preparations

Preparation for this work began way back, seven years ago in a little town in Napa Valley, as far away in character and geography from NYC as you can get. What I did in the immediate preparation was to revisit the event and seek a deeper understanding in order to find symbols and metaphors that best represent the work.

Section 3.1: Understandings and Representations

In hundreds of hours of interviews with Haley, Richie, their family and community, we quickly understood this: that sorrow feels multiplied a thousand fold when it is a senseless loss, and that nothing could change or hide the undeniable fact that Maddison was dead because of her mother. For Haley, this sorrow was coupled with immense guilt. She knew that she was wholly responsible for Maddison, and that the lapse of memory that caused her death, was her own fault and no one else's. She knew she "had taken Maddison away from everybody". (Bulwa, 2009)

Heather, in her interview, struggled to give the reason for her niece's death, initially avoiding the terrible truth, until finally she admitted: "she...forgot" (SATC). While there was absolutely no doubt and attempt to skirt responsibility of Maddison's death on Haley's part, we also witnessed how all those in her closest circle: her husband, sister, daycare provider, all felt guilt as well - as if by doing so they might be able to

relieve Haley's burden in some small way.

The aftermath of this tragedy in our community was complex, made even more so when the district attorney's office filed the felony complaint of involuntary manslaughter against Haley, which carries a maximum sentence of four years in state prison. The tragedy became a crime with this legal action, and with the coverage on the news, many more people who didn't know Haley personally weighed in into the conversation. Vitriol and damnation came through online newspaper reader responses and emails sent directly to Haley. There were also compassionate responses - mostly along the lines of other parents who nearly had done the same thing. It felt, to her and her community, as if she was the first and only person to commit such an act, for no one could possibly have done this - or if so, they only nearly did.

In our research for the documentary, we found that this could not be further from the truth. The national nonprofit organization Kids And Cars reports that on the average, every 10 days, a child dies from heat stroke through being left in a car by their parents. Since the group began tracking data, at least 670 children have died in these preventable tragedies with at least 18 children dead this year alone. (Fantz, 2014)

In his Pulitzer winning article *Fatal Distraction: Forgetting a Child in the Backseat of a Car Is A Horrifying Mistake. Is It a Crime?*, Gene Weingarten of the Washington Post writes:

"There may be no act of human failing that more fundamentally challenges our society's views about crime, punishment, justice and mercy. According to statistics compiled by a national child's safety advocacy group, in about 40 percent of cases, authorities examine the evidence, determine that the child's death was a terrible accident -- a mistake of memory that delivers a lifelong sentence of guilt far greater than any a judge or jury could mete out -- and file no charges. In the other 60 percent of the cases, parsing essentially identical facts and applying them to essentially identical laws, authorities decide that the negligence was so great and the injury so grievous that it must be called a felony, and it must be aggressively pursued."

His research focused specifically on the cases that matched Haley's: usually competent parents with no history of neglect or behavioral problems like substance abuse who, due to a brief lapse of memory, caused the death of their child. What is the role of punishment in this? If punishment is the action taken to deter possible offenders, and to bring justice to victims - does it have a role in this case? Haley decided to plead not guilty, saying, "I don't know that punishing the parent after the fact is going to solve the problem." (Bulwa, 2009) Despite the guilt she felt, she believed more strongly that no grieving parent and their family should be made to go through legal battles in addition to the knowledge that "you never forgive yourself. There is no moving on." (SATC).

Ultimately, the word that kept coming back again in all of our research and interviews was not punishment, justice or mercy, but blame. In *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, Coates and Tognazzini cover a fascinating gamut of thinkers on blame. From

Smart, the utilitarian who tries to justify blame by “pointing to the efficacy of the practices of blame in regulating behavior in socially desirable ways” to Strawson's critique of it - that it “loses sight (perhaps wishes to lose sight) of the human attitudes of which these practices are, in part, the expression” and these attitudes are “something we are given with the fact of human society”, not something it is in our nature to be able to give up. Watson's criticism of Strawson is that this retributive act of blame is against “an ideal of human fellowship or love which embodies values that are...important to our civilization.” (23-24). Coates and Tognazzini believe that we celebrate this ideal when we laud revolutionaries like Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr., “one takes seriously the wrongs perpetrated against oppressed groups without acquiescing to the desire to inflict suffering on transgressors.”

All of these ideas were in some way expressed in Haley's case. District Attorney Gary Lieberstein channels Smart in his decision to prosecute because: “I have no doubt that Mrs. Wesley and her husband will grieve the loss of Maddison for the rest of their lives. I also believe, however, that this tragedy could have and should have been avoided.” (Bulwa, 2009) In many of the discussions and interviews we had with the community, a common response was that people just needed someone to blame for this tragedy - they needed to hold someone responsible whether or not that would actually change the situation for the future of society. It was part of how they expressed their sense of justice. In Richie, Haley's husband, we found a profound example of ideal human fellowship and love. When he came to the hospital to meet Haley after Maddison was taken in, Haley remembers this:

"At that point, whatever he wanted to do, to say, I had made the decision to take it. His first reaction was, 'How could you ...' But he didn't even finish that sentence." Instead, he gathered her into his arms and held her. Later, at her parents' house in Santa Rosa, Richie pulled Haley's mother and father aside and made a request. As Haley's father, Rob Fenderson, recalls it, Richie said, "Please don't say anything that would make Haley feel bad. I lost one - I don't want to lose them both." "I thought a lot of him before that," says Fenderson, the principal, "But I thought even more of him after that." (Bulwa, 2009)

All of this happened in the public sphere, and in the documentary film we investigated the legal and social realities that Haley and her family dealt with in the aftermath of Maddison's death. We interviewed Janette Fennell of Kids and Cars, the organization that tracks all of the statistics and advocates for more legalization to prevent parents from accidentally forgetting their children thus causing vehicular heatstroke and death. We spoke with David Diamond, a neuroscientist who has testified in court on how the brain works in these cases of parents' fatal negligence, and covered the reasons how a loving parent could possibly have done it without malicious intent. The story of the documentary was mainly about Haley's public journey, and how we might consider the different perspectives of how and why this could happen, through experts and Haley's circumstances.

For the play, I revisited the event, and all the impressions and sentiments that I had encountered related to it, to understand, analyze and integrate, so as to invent and formulate representations - themes, characters, events - and a world to populate them.

Section 3.2: Inventing the World of the Work

*Definition 2: **Wake** [weyk], v*
To wake - from sleep, apathy, or ignorance.
To become cognizant or aware.

Alani Denton, Haley's niece, was in a few of the original plays I made at Pacific Union College. We were discussing the first moment of adult consciousness that happens - and when that happens for each of us. The rest of the cast were college students, and we all determined that it was so long ago we weren't sure what actually triggered it. I asked Alani, being 12 at the time, if she could remember when that awakening happened for her. She said, "Yes. When Maddison died."

What is it about trauma and tragedy that has the ability to awaken the self? My preparation for this play and the construction of its world began with researching and imagining the stages of grief, and the process of guilt Haley went through in the four months she was away in Hawaii. The blame that Haley would have put herself through, the "I did this. It was my fault." And rightfully so. But when does this guilt become self-torture? And whom does it actually help?

The world of the play is not about Haley's story or character, or even in the plot of what she went through. It is not based in Napa Valley, California. It is not documentary theatre in the same way I have been used to creating, though we do use verbatim text from Haley's interviews. I often describe documentary theatre as beginning with fact and

adding poetry, in the metaphor of the stage, but also in the way we manipulate the verbatim information. Carol Martin, in *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage*, describes the forms that theatre of the real takes:

"Theatre of the real's strategies are often postmodern, especially in asserting that truth is contextual, multiple, and subject to manipulation; that language frames perception; that art can be objective; that perspectives proliferate; that history is a network of relationships; that things occur by chance; that the performer can be a person and not necessarily a character in the theatrical sense; that theatre include the quotidian; that the then, now, and soon-to-be can coexist on stage. Most decisively, the playwright as a single individual is displaced or even replaced by an assemblage of selected verbatim texts that are also often collectively devised. Most importantly, creators of theatre of the real assert that meaning is within reach even while using postmodern theatrical strategies." (p.3)

I love the possibilities of collapsing time on stage, and finding the theatrical language for how "the then, now, and soon-to-be can coexist" for meaning to be within reach. In choosing the form of music theatre, the possibilities for how time is perceived opens up as well. I knew that with music theatre, we would be able to traverse a poetic landscape - where music could describe the indescribable, and that the world of the play was simply to support that which cannot be said. I envisioned a place that supported the themes of guilt and grief for the process of awakening.

In Weingarten's article *Fatal Distraction*, one of the quotes from Lyn Balfour that always stayed with me was: "People say I'm a strong woman, but I'm not. It's just that when I grieve, I grieve alone . . . because deep down I feel I don't have the right to grieve in front of others."

The world of the play is within the character's psyche, in this alone space where no one else can physically enter. It is a private, internal world, one of dreams and nightmares, where the illogical, visual, and wildly associative take preference before plot and linear understanding. It is a space where a galaxy might collapse into a black hole in a few seconds, while it takes ten hours to bake a cake. It is where the imagination rules, for better or worse, and where the archetypes of our primordial selves come to bear. In later sections of this thesis, where we lay out the construction of this play, we continue to look at the world of the play, which incorporates not only the grief of a mother from a true story, but the cosmos of universal suffering and guilt.

The world of this play is largely formed by the images of epic physical landscapes that are the metaphor for the wide expanse of emotional life within us. These landscapes came intuitively to me, through images of the play. However, as I did more research throughout the process, I realized that these intuitions were derived by just tapping into a collective consciousness fed through history, literature, and studies of human psychology. My first images were: a thick forest at night/dusk, with one creature stuck behind trees as if they were bars, a large desert like Joshua Tree with rough foliage and heavy blizzard, and drowning underwater due to a flood. As I began to research what these might mean

dramaturgically, I found references that cemented and expanded on why these landscapes evoked the journey that the Mother would need to take. We found that the order of these mattered - what was it like to enter into a forest? Does that make a big difference from being submerged in water in the beginning? How do these landscapes constitute a plot? Is there a way to find a logic through these metaphors?

It was at times frustrating, given that the images came first before logic. In fact, a member of the team even asked if it might be helpful to come up with the plot/story first, and then the image. However, I've learned that this is not how devising often works, and that sometimes, making from the subconscious will result in mysteries that make good dramaturgical sense.



Forest:

The world of the work opens in a forest, long recognized as a metaphor for feelings of

being lost, perils, unconsciousness, or the dark sub-conscious.

Dante, The Inferno, uses it for representing one's feeling lost in life's journey: "In the middle of the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood where the straightway was lost." J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, expands it further: "The Forest is connected at all levels with the symbolism of the female principle or of *the Great Mother*... the place where vegetable life thrives and luxuriates, free from any control or cultivation. And since its foliage obscures the light of the sun, it is therefore regarded as opposed to the sun's power and as a symbol of the earth... Since the female principle is identified with the unconsciousness in Man, it follows that the forest is also *a symbol of the unconsciousness*. It is for this reason that Jung maintains that the sylvan terrors that figure so prominently in children's tales symbolize the perilous aspects of the unconsciousness, that is, *its tendency to devour or obscure reason*."

J.C. Cooper, An Illustrated Encyclopedia Of Traditional Symbols, sees it as a threshold symbol, perils on one hand, and rebirth on the other, like a ying yang: "Entering the Dark Forest or the Enchanted Forest is a threshold symbol; *the soul entering the perils of the unknown*; the realm of death; the secrets of nature, or the spiritual world which man must penetrate to find the meaning...retreat into the forest is *symbolic death before initiatory rebirth*." This duality is also dealt with by Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses Of Enchantment: The Meaning And Importance of Fairy Tales: "[The forest] symbolizes the place in which *inner darkness is confronted and worked through*; where uncertainty is resolved about who one is; and where one begins to understand who one wants to be...Since ancient times the near impenetrable forest in

which we get lost has symbolized the dark, hidden, near-impenetrable world of our unconscious. *If we have lost the framework which gave structure to our past life and must now find our way to become ourselves*, and have entered this wilderness with an as yet undeveloped personality, when we succeed in finding our way out *we shall emerge with a much more highly developed humanity.*"

The type of forest also mattered - I knew this would not be a rainforest from the tropics. It would not be lush with flowers or filled with animals. This was a forest that the moonlight barely made through the tall trunks and the sky would barely be seen. From one's perspective on the ground all sides look the same. It is a labyrinth within itself, and it is perpetual night and heavy fog. Through the trees, one might see the shadows of dreams that haunt the wood. Nothing is heard. The leaves rustle. One's breath can never be unheard.

Desert:

The forest gives way to a desert, a somewhat different place. Jane Tompkins, West of Everything, makes a comparison: "When a man walks or rides into a forest, he is lost among the trees, can't see ahead, doesn't know what might be lurking there. The *forest surrounds him, obscures him with shadows*, confuses itself with him by its vertical composition and competitive detail. But when a horseman appears on the desert plain, *he dominates it instantly, his view extends as far as the eye can see, and enemies are exposed to his gaze*. The desert flatters the human figure by making it seem *dominant and unique, dark against the light, vertical against horizontal, solid against plane, detail against blankness.*"



"There is nothing to stop the horseman's free movement across the terrain...Distance, made palpable through exposure and infinitely prolonged by the absence of obstacles, offers unlimited room to move. *The man can go, in any direction, as far as he can go. The possibilities are infinite.*"

J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, similarly sees positive potential in what is usually considered a negative landscape : "This confirms the specific symbolism of the desert as *the most propitious place for divine revelation ...* This is because the desert, in so far as it is in a way a negative landscape, is the realm of abstraction located outside the sphere of existence and *susceptible only to things transcendent*. Furthermore, the desert is the domain of the sun, not as the creator of energy upon earth but as the pure, celestial radiance, blinding in its manifestation ... burning drought is the climate par excellence of pure, ascetic spirituality - of the *consuming of the body for the salvation of the soul.*"

The desert, except for nomads, is something to be crossed rather than lived in. In this sense, it is a type of barrier to a particular promised land. As the middle landscape of *Wake*, I was intrigued by the notion that the desert is a place without phenomena of shadows - or perhaps in certain circumstances, the shadow is strikingly the only thing one might see.

During December of 2013, while I was in the writing process of *Wake*, I went to Joshua Tree National Park with dear friends. As we drove through, it began to hail and then turned into a blizzard. This experience, as rare as it was, imprinted the image of a bathtub in the midst of blizzard in desert. The bathtub, where one is cleansed, is also a place for death and rebirth of one's conscience. A place to start again through the stripping away of everything that has gone before. The fragility of a naked body in the need to be cleansed, in a brutal environment made even more extreme with cold felt true to the subject matter of guilt and grief. The desert landscape as a place for divine revelation, bound by the domestic simplicity of the humble bathtub, was an interesting paradox for another spiral to take place for the Mother.

Water as Blizzard and Flood:

Finally, water and flood. From the earliest accounts of human history, in the Bible's Genesis, water is seen as a peril as in the flood that destroyed the earth, as well as a precursor to creation, and re-creation:

"Darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Genesis 1:2

“And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth, ...all the high hills were covered...And all fresh died...only Noah remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.” Genesis 7: 19,23

“Go forth...be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth.” Genesis 8:16,17

“



Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, summarizes it thus: "The waters symbolize the universal sum of virtualities; they are ...'spring and origin,' the *reservoir of all possibilities of existence*; they *precede every form and support every creation*...In whatever religious complex we find them, the waters invariably retain their function; *they disintegrate, abolish forms, 'wash away sins'; they are at once purifying and regenerating*. Their destiny is to *precede the Creation and to reabsorb it*...immersion in water signifies regression to the preformed, reincorporation into the undifferentiated mode of pre-existence; immersion is equivalent to a *dissolution of forms*. This is why a symbolism of water implies *both death and rebirth*...because dissolution is followed by a new birth (and)...because immersion fertilizes and multiplies the potential of life."

There is a need to be cleansed, and a hope to start anew in the Mother's story. The nature of the spiral from landscape to landscape illustrates the vacillation between hope and despair. While our best hope is a promise - to be cleansed and given another chance (especially from ourselves) – it could also turn out to be a lie. No matter what is done - how much one punishes oneself, in some circumstances, nothing can clear the devastation. In the Mother's eyes - nothing can save her, and nothing can cleanse her. She senses a lie in the promise of salvation. There is a lie to thinking that we are over something. For soon something else triggers us to return to what feels like the same place of devastation. In making this piece, we knew that after the bathtub, there would be a moment like this, when the world seems new and beautiful, as if the event never happened. A temporary return to perfection. The delusion of this lie then leads to even more sorrow in the realization that it was simply a dream. This brings on a flood, which represents the shock of returning to a state from which we thought we had recovered.

It is like a second death. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred & the Profane*, speaks of this, although she sees the hope of a new creation afterwards: ***"flood mythologies have their counterpoint, on the human level, in man's 'second death'...or in the initiatory death through baptism...the immersion in waters is equivalent "to a temporary reincorporation into the indistinct, followed by a new creation, a new life, or a 'new man'...the flood is comparable to baptism."***

Growing up as a conservative Christian, I have been ingrained with this notion of the biblical apocalypse - of a physical event (flood, baptism, second coming) leading to a spiritual renewal (re-creation, re-birth, redemption.) Floods symbolize the end of one cycle of time and the beginning of a new cycle of time, which brings the new world after the death of the old. In addition, the sheer force of a flood, a flood of tears, a flood of emotion, represent well the overwhelming force of incredible sadness and guilt. These multi-pronged concepts of renewal, rebirth, sadness and guilt, are represented by flood in Wake, as her sins seem cleansed at one moment, and at the next, unforgivable by herself.

Ocean/Underwater:

In the world of the play, ocean follows water and flood, with its uncertain and unpredictable finality – the ultimate ying yang.



So J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, talks about the ocean as dynamic force and universal life generator: "It is a symbol, therefore, of *dynamic forces and of*

transitional states between the stable (solids) and the formless (air or gas). The ocean as a whole, as opposed to the concept of the drop of water, is a symbol of universal life as opposed to the particular. It is regarded traditionally as the *source of the generation of all life*." While, drawing from Indian culture, Heinrich comments on its seeds of anti-thesis. Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths And Symbols In Indian Art And Civilization*: "[the ocean] *is immense illogic...that it is a vast expanse dreaming its own dreams and asleep in its own reality, yet containing within itself the seeds of its antithesis*."

In Wake, the flood brings the ocean, which becomes finally, a place of silence and stillness. After the tumultuous and thundering flood, we reach the in-between, a purgatory. This state is the place where one reaches when there is no other place to go. It provides nominal rest, but not peace. It is a place after drowning, when the lungs have filled, and the fight is over. It is a place of acceptance that is also filled with regret and bitterness. A place where one continues to vacillate between states, seemingly forever.

Section 3.3: Constructing Events/ Inventing Characters: Roles and Relationships

Construction of Events

In addition to the space of landscapes, we also constructed the events of the world. The structure and bones of Wake lie in the cyclical, spiral structure that Ram Dass articulates about grief: "Rather than close ourselves to grieve, we learn that the process is not cut and dried. It's more like a spiral that brings us to a place of release, abates for a

time, and then continues on a deeper level. Often, when grieving, we think it's over, only to find ourselves swept away by another wave of intense feeling. For this reason, it's important to be patient with the process, and not be in a hurry to put our grief behind us. "

The spiraling to a place of release, and then the repetition of that as a structure was clear to me from the beginning. One of the first thoughts we had as a team was that the mother would relive that day again and again. The reasons are manifold: to try to figure out what went wrong, seeking a way out of the past, and perhaps also a spell that is cast to banish the day. As we developed the play, it became clear that time itself was the major character and organizing principle of *Wake*. The time for each spiral to occur - the time of abatement, and the time in which we believe all is past, to the time of the impending return. With this particular guilt, it felt like there needed to be another side of the coin to the adage "time heals everything." This felt like it needed a larger presence - something to be named, an image, a reality that was epic.

I was led to a book about Kali, the Black Goddess of Dakshineswar written by Elizabeth Harding. "Kali comes from the word 'kala', or time. She is the power of time which devours all." (p41) This definition began to work on me - the guilt needed to be devoured, the darkness eliminated and consumed by another force as powerful. Harding says: "Kali is the Mistress of Time, the cause of worldly change, and as such, she consumes all things. All beings and all things must yield to her in the end - our desires and hopes, our family, romantic ties, our friends, possessions and hard earned success in business. As the eternal, indifferent Time she confronts man with his pitiful finite attachments, swallows them up, and produces them again in a different form, in a

different time." (p. 59) This definition brought a sense of context - the microcosm of our tiny human lives in light of the macrocosm of our universe and all that ever was and will be. With this, came the realization that in this internal and epic world, we are not dealing with human forgiveness of each other. This is not a love story between a husband and wife. This is not "love conquers all" between two individuals where one has wronged another. I felt that I needed to find the supernatural, perhaps believing that only the divine could make a difference in this realm.

I started to build a structure where the mother character was going through and got lost in the spirals of guilt, and that the only ones who could save her were goddesses who were also mothers: perhaps of different cultures and origins, e.g. Virgin Mary of Guadalupe, Kuan Yin the Chinese goddess of mercy and compassion, Kali, etc. In this strange nightmare world of the interior, a divine intervention seemed necessary for the main character to change course - and for the divine intervention to be by one who is also mother. In researching more on Kali, I also found another thread of what Haley might have experienced.

"Kali is the full picture of the Universal Power. She is Mother, the Benign, and Mother, the Terrible. She creates and nourishes and she kills and destroys. By Her magic we see good and bad, but in reality there is neither. This whole world and all we see is the play of Maya, the veiling power of the Divine Mother. God is neither good nor bad, no both. God is beyond the pair of opposites which constitute this relative existence."
(Harding, p. 39)

I was struck by the notion of a Mother and Creator who is also Destroyer. Benign AND Terrible. This was a revelation - we construct the idea of Mother as Angel and Saint, and in so doing, leave no room for holding in our minds the Mother who is good and yet has failed her own, especially in such an extreme circumstance. It is similar to how we in the mainstream Judeo-Christian context perceive God as being "...good all the time; All the time, God is good." This insistence to refuse duality within the divine is then transferred to how we perceive those around us as good and evil, without an in-between or both/and. I realized that this was the primary source of revulsion and aversion to Haley's story for many, and that those who judged severely needed to do so to maintain this definition of Mother. This revelation started to close the gap of the divine and the human for me, but I still wasn't sure of the actual function of the divine in this play. Was the supernatural an actual character that showed up as a body in the space? Was it named and called for, but never appeared? Or was it just an idea to build a foundation off of?

As part of our preparation, I invited the design team and collaborative writers to contribute subject matter that they thought was relevant. This was before any script had emerged, and we only had loose ingredients of events, images, landscapes, and a vague idea about the process of guilt. And then Jennifer Reiser, the lighting designer, brought in the book "Women Who Run With the Wolves" by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés. In her introduction, Dr. Estés articulates the Wild Woman as that which all women have within, but either are ignorant or have forgotten how to access. She also paints a picture of woman as divine and human, and this passage in particular brought a great deal of clarity:

"The Wild Woman carries the bundles for healing; she carries everything a woman needs to be and know. She carries the medicine for all things. She carries stories and dreams and words and songs and signs and symbols. She is both vehicle and destination. " (p.12)

After reading that passage, I knew that forgiveness to move on didn't lie in divine intervention - at least, not the kind that I had been imagining. Growing up in the Protestant denomination of Seventh-Day Adventism, I spent the first 20 years of my life waiting for an actual return of Jesus Christ. I realize now that whatever structures I believe I'm creating are actually the embedded truths taught to me in the past. Each piece I make has revealed this - that my first choices are always a manifestation of what I've been taught. Through theatre, the investigation pushes me to create new structures that try to make sense of the world from my own current observations and experience. Whatever would save her would have to come from within. The divine is within.

I was reading the Dhammapada at this time, and this saying came through like a lighthouse beam in heavy fog. "Arise and watch." To arise, to haul oneself from the mud - what would that require? This was one of the major missing links. We returned to the structure of the cycles of guilt as depicted through the landscapes, and the text that would repeat of going through the day and what happened. I began to realize that there was a natural progression of water - fog laden forest, blizzard in the desert bathtub, and a flood submerging all. What then would be the progression of what she was searching for in her memories and reliving to bring her from one state to the next?

The day of shooting the documentary was one that I will never forget, for it is the day we received the medical report from the hospital, describing the state of Maddison's body when she was declared deceased. The description was graphic and detailed, and one could tell what she went through in the last hours of her life through the damage caused on her body. From all the interviews we did of those who actually saw Maddison's body, they all said they couldn't sleep for months after having seen it. Perhaps this is what the Mother avoids each time she goes through the day - nearly getting to it every time, and turning away from it so that she can remain in the time when the child's flesh was still unbroken and her breath intact. The flood, then, comes when she finally cannot turn away from the reality of the flesh, and the flood completely overwhelms, destroys, and submerges her into a place where she can witness herself.

Another saying that kept ringing was simply: "Awake. Be the witness of your thoughts. The elephant hauls himself from the mud." I realized that from the place of meditation came the birth of this piece, and that the piece itself was staging the process of meditation. "Awake" is the gift and command of the Buddha, and perhaps that is what could free the Mother from the trappings of the ego in her guilt. The name of the play came from this. "Be witness of your thoughts." The next step was to dramatize that - to find the right metaphor of a play within the play for her to be able to see herself go through the cycles, to replay everything from the beginning through her perspective. This began as a diorama: a physical object that represented a small scale version of the set in the theatre would appear, and that she would somehow have a miniature reality that plays back for her to watch. This became a screen that shut off the Mother from the audience,

and we had images, surreal and haunting of her self-torture with distorted music from the first part of the show. Yet there was a step missing, we were looking for how to break the cycles that would perpetuate, for even when we are able to notice our negative patterns - we often repeat them. How do we break the pattern, when the grooves are already setting in for us to continue?

It was at this point where my collaborators and I got stuck. We weren't sure what should happen next. I decided to ask Gina Sharpe, a wise woman and meditation teacher, to advise me on the themes of this project. Upon hearing the construct, she began to reframe forgiveness, and brought up the idea of compassion as the first step towards forgiveness:

"Proximate cause of compassion, it's seeing the effects/impact of suffering on oneself or others. Interesting—actually, without suffering, compassion wouldn't exist. This is the bittersweet door into the liberated heart. Buddha taught that it's only on this life plane that awakening, freedom is possible. Without the 10,000 joys and the 10,000 sorrows we would be on another realm. If we didn't have sorrow, awakening would not be possible."

From this conversation, I realized that seeing the effects of her own sorrow could be the first step, but that the realization that one is not alone in this suffering was also necessary to give up the ego of one's own guilt. This was the development I was looking for, the event that would give the Mother the ability to see outside of her own incredible pain, to realize that she is not alone in this. Through understanding that, she has the

possibility of taking herself out of the equation of blame and guilt, and have the compassion for those others extended upon herself. This also came from Gina Sharpe, that in having compassion for living beings, we must include ourselves -it is too easy to forgo that step. For the Mother, this would be the turning point that would shift her out of the cycle, to be able to see everything as it is, as opposed to the construct that will cause herself the most pain.

Inventing Characters: Roles and Relationships

The entire play has unfolded in this way - as if it was being revealed. The definition of the relationships in Wake have unfolded in the same way in process and product. An evaluation of what the social and political relationships are between the characters is just the beginning - it would be also necessary to investigate what the spiritual and symbolic relationships are between the characters, as well as within themselves. As the character list developed, so did the play, because of the way the characters shift and transform to multiple representations and functions.

CHARACTER LIST:

Mother
Father/Horse
Mother Daemons
Child
Musicians
Ensemble

MOTHER:

One of the main issues with determining the character of the Mother had to do with the real life mother from whose story we took inspiration. Was this Haley? Would

we set this in Napa, California? As a documentary theatre maker I was well aware of the ethical considerations of representing a real person. In this case, with the form and trajectory that we had chosen to deal with the subject matter, I knew that this would not be Haley's particular journey out of her grief and guilt, but my imaginings of how that might happen in that circumstance. I knew it was not about reconstruction of her and her house for a set, but that it was the launching pad - her words would give us the door into the grief. One of the things that made that clear was what name she would speak when talking about her child. It felt wrong to use Maddison's name - we even felt like it was better to change the gender of the child as well. Those delineations really helped separate truth from the play we were making, and gave us the freedom of figuring out our own piece rather than only adhere to what Haley had reported saying and doing.

As Van Alphen says: "History, too, is an act of the imagination. Both the historian and creators of the theatre of the real 'select events form an uninterrupted stream and invent meanings that create patterns within that stream". (Martin,p. 6) We were interested in selecting the narrative she had for that day and the way in which she would relive that day obsessively to try to find a way out from the past. She, however, had spent those four months in Hawaii and reported that nothing very interesting happened during that time, except for a healer that she went to, who massaged her, surrounded with candles. So by overlooking that particular detail, we decided to make a piece about awareness of other's sufferings being the key to releasing a tight hold on one's own. Otherwise, the key would have been a physical one - where the touch of another human being leads to healing. Also a beautiful and profound realization, but not the pattern we wanted to examine.

When I first started writing, I thought that piece was really about how the desire and addiction of perfection is bred into all of us, and especially mothers. The stories we construct about ourselves, the building of our ego, and all of the things that fall away when we realize that which is everlasting. The story of being the perfect mother is a lie, which puts incredible amount of stress on mothers. I thought that this piece could be about a woman who was considered perfect, and through the slip of the mind, falls through to have to rebuild her entire identity again.

To that end, we decided that the character first begin as an opera singer. Since this is an opera, we thought we could work with the metaphor of the stage, and the perfection represented. Underneath, is the real person. Beyond the mask is the flesh. Beyond the diva's dress is the saliva and throw up stained clothing. As we continued, however, we realized that it wasn't the central idea to the play anymore. The pulling apart of a constructed self-narrative was no longer the nexus - pulling apart was not the right action, but a ripping away. That is part of the pain of guilt- that one could not live up to one's own ideal. The way to begin was simply that of a picture of Mother and family. This allowed us to set up the simplicity of everyday life, which would be the thing most missed when tragedy strikes.

The Mother's relationship to all the other characters is that of the central perspective, the controlling frame. They act upon her - pushing her through the landscapes. They reveal all of the accusations and the past memories that she is

tormented by. They indict her as much as she indicts herself. This is happening in her mind and all others are in relationship to her, until they gain their own stories at the end.

FATHER/HORSE:

The origin of this character was necessary in order to reveal the impotence of the partner in helping one through guilt like this. Haley actually said that it was almost worse that Richie, her husband was so amazing - there was even more blame for herself.

Though it was clear that his love and support were necessary for her to make it through, there was still a place deep inside that he could not reach. It was necessary to portray the interior of the mind as a place where even our loved ones cannot penetrate despite their best wishes, and the absolute aloneness when one is stuck in one's own ego.

In thinking about the Father, I knew that there was great loss for him as well. It was a decision to center this piece around the Mother, but it could also have been the Father's story. We wanted the presence of the Father to be made strange in the forest so I imagined the nightmare of being lost in a forest, with no person in sight except for a man with a horse's head - stuck behind trees and unable to speak. The familiar made strange is a powerful aspect of dream logic. In seeking for the right animal head, we pored through many options. Ultimately, it was the horse. In Chinese symbolism, the horse represents love, endurance, devotion and stability, as well as the psychological and emotional ability to go on in life.

It was important for us that this did not become a love story between the Father

and the Mother. Wake was never meant to be a "love conquers all" tale. It was tricky balancing who this character was because there was no thread of his reality outside of the play. We decided to negotiate between what the Mother believes of him in nightmare (with the horse head) and in dream (without).

The final moments for the Father, however, echoed one of the most heartbreaking clips of the documentary. He gives a eulogy at the funeral, and I think this really stuck with me, the tragedy of a parent eulogizing a child that should not have died. This echo of the real brought everything together and connected the dream/nightmare back to the real. We decided to end the play with the couple together on stage, instead of her alone. This for us was an important statement of having been through the internal strife - there is still the outside world to grapple with, and the mystery and hope of what that relationship would continue to be was a necessary counterpoint.

MOTHER DAEMONS:

I had originally cast three women as the goddesses - they were to be the ones that at the penultimate moment would enter in with divine intervention. As the text developed, we realized that they were actually images of herself that she would want to destroy, but in those images and voices, they could also represent societal views that were harsh upon her. We called them Mother Daemons that reflected her own struggle, and they functioned as her own voice, accusing, sometimes comforting, sometimes ugly, and sometimes beautiful. They assaulted her, assisted her, and gave a strange life to the imaginative world.

These women were major collaborators in how their relationship to the Mother was executed. We knew that it would be a predominantly physical one, without text. We explored a great deal of possibilities of what they looked like - were they splitting images of her, with blond hair and blue eyes? Were they grotesque versions of her? Did they resemble people? We decided to work with masks that were made of the same material as the Horse's head. They were in the dream world like he was, and there was something necessary for them to be uniform and to blur away the details of the faces, as if she was watching them and trying to recognize who they were.

We struggled with the choreography of it - working on the balance between helping and hurting. I feel that we could have developed and articulated this relationship much more, but ran out of time. What was successful, however, was what we discovered towards the end of the process. We wondered if the masks should be taken off, and we realized that it was a necessary action because one of them does become the Child. The big question was, what does the mask removal reveal? What do we see in them that we do not expect, but that would make sense dramaturgically and add to the play?

I was introduced to this Sufi teaching by Gina Sharpe:

*Overcome any bitterness
that may have come
because you were not up
to the magnitude of the pain
that was entrusted to you.*

*Like the Mother of the World,
Who carries the pain of the world in her heart,
Each one of us is part of her heart,
And therefore endowed
With a certain measure of cosmic pain.*

As we were working through the last few moments, I realized that they were, all the time, also mothers who had lost their children. I was as blind to it as she was blind to it. Previously, they served her only because of her perception of being the center of the universe. However, it made sense that she couldn't see their pain, only her own, but when her eyes were opened, their identities were revealed. Thus, those helping her and hurting her together were also those who had experienced the loss of a child. This is a loss that no matter how it is caused, the mother will go through great guilt for not being able to stop it.

CHILD:

The child character came from the realization that we needed a moment that would be the heart of the loss. Haley herself would talk about this - the future that is no longer. The destruction of dreams and the future that was planned and longed for: seeing your child grow up, grow in grace and wisdom, get married, etc. The milestones of life as society defines them. We realized that this was the place where she is able to see all that she had hoped for the child, and then be able to face the child - try to apologize, grasp and grasp without being successful in having him hear her. We realized that this should be played by one of the Mother Daemons, as we wanted it to remain in the realm of the

dream - a dream within the dream.

MUSICIANS:

The musicians on stage were a necessity for the music, but their role also morphed further along the process. Like the Mother Daemons, the musicians were also assisting along the way. They did this musically, as the Mother Daemons did it physically. We decided that the violin echoed the child and the flute echoed the Mother. Margaret, the flute player, also had blond hair and blue eyes like Marnie, and we considered making them doubled in costume as well. Ultimately, we integrated the musicians into the action and on the stage fully.

At the end of the piece, I realized that these musicians should also be a part of the opening of the Mother's eyes to the suffering of the world, or cosmic pain. I realized that if she would be able to see and hear their personal sufferings as well, it would contribute to the opening up of the world so that it was no longer just her story, but others as well.

ENSEMBLE:

I also saw a large ensemble of ten to fifteen that would serve as a chorus, a mirror of the audience, that would also be caught in their own sufferings, as we all are, walking around each day. This group would need to be diverse to represent the world. They would speak many different languages, be of different ethnicities, ages, etc.

The idea was that they would also have their own dioramas of the world that they

were focused on. They would be entrenched as well, like the Mother has been, in their own sufferings. She would witness that on a universal scale in order to awaken to the knowledge that all share the experience of pain.

Section 3.4: The Team – Selection and Collaboration

Wake was made purely by collaboration. Each thought I had on the structure or the events was shared with my team and their continual feedback and ideas shaped the piece that was the final performance. The longer I make theatre, the more I understand that it is the best way to work with a creative team. The aspect of collaboration in creation is central to theatre, especially with devised and original work. I am particularly interested in discovering and testing unorthodox ways that create unique processes that engage and involve artists. I have been experimenting with different prompts for devising work for years now. Sometimes it's a textual prompt of making work from a set of poems. Sometimes it's a site, outdoors or indoors, that begs to be filled. In 2010, I made a piece where I asked the set designer to build the set before the play had been written. I gave him a few principles of what we wanted to investigate and some guidelines such as: a rabbit hole, ways of disappearing and appearing, and the need for skewed perspective. What happened was a freedom in playing on the set and having something physical to create off of - which was very exciting. While it seems counterintuitive, I have found that when the text doesn't come first, there's a freedom of expression that occurs which pushes the boundaries of how we represent reality. I call this radical collaboration, and I practice it any chance I get.

Writing and Design Team

The team that is brought together for collaborations like this needs to be chosen well and courted in a way that they understand how the process will proceed. This way of making work is not for everyone,. It is often confusing, frustrating, with no clarity in sight. Having some experience in working this way, I meet with the designer and lay out the expectations I have in how to work. I invite them to not only design, but dramaturge, write, and feel free to collaborate in any way. I worked this way with the production I did for Materials project, *19*, which was made with more or less the same team as *Wake*. With one actor and six designers, we would gather together for writing sessions - writing meaning creating the events that would hold the text, which was non-dramatic and an essay. I would give the designers prompts - to bring in music, textures and props, ways of using sound, etc., that are inspired from the world of research in order to make events, moments, or even characters. This takes a lot longer and requires much more investment of time and thought from the designers. Again, this is not for everyone or for every project, but those who love working this way, are excited to do so because it is a rare and fulfilling creative experience.

I came to understand this when I had to switch my thesis to *Wake*. I had built my whole team already, despite the fact that we didn't have a script for the Liao Yiwu project at the time, only the source material of the prison memoir. They had worked on *19*, so already had interest in the subject matter. With four months to opening, switching a project on them felt like a major breach of artistic contract. I apologized profusely and let them know that they should feel free to remove themselves from making the next piece -

that there will absolutely be a next piece, but that I had no idea what it would be at that point. To my great relief, all the designers except one were game for whatever we chose to do next.

The way designers think is wonderful- they have an innate sense of image and atmosphere. The work that happens in this way for me is so much more exciting because the vision is much greater than my own. We end up harnessing more imaginations that are creating together than just creating towards a more specific goal. Ultimately, my job is to make sure that everything is moving together for a vision and purpose that can be communicated to the audience, but when I work with designers in this way, it opens up the vision and helps us all to think larger about the work. They don't just come to the early rehearsals. They ARE the early rehearsals. They are the writing. They are the makers. When we start to define all of our roles as makers - that is the true test of great collaboration.

I also involve an actor or two in this kind of process, unless it is about devising as an ensemble and then it's all the actors. They are involved in the design process as well. They not only get to help with defining what and how they say text, but where they say it, and to whom. Though this is almost second nature to me now, I realize that this is not commonplace in traditional American theatre.

Librettist: Christopher Chen

Because of the nature of Wake being a piece that is based on a true story and there

was verbatim text for source material, I knew that I needed a writer on board who would help to turn the text into libretto for Marnie. I searched out a few writers who had expressed a desire to work collaboratively on something, and finally found the perfect person to work on *Wake*. Christopher Chen is a San Francisco based playwright who is quickly emerging onto the national scene. We had worked together many years ago on a piece of his about Iris Chang, the woman who wrote *The Rape of Nanking* and soon after committed suicide. He has an incredibly sophisticated philosophical framework, and it shows in all of his work. Non-naturalistic, always pushing the boundaries, Chris has an amazing ability to weave reality into surrealism. This would be his first collaboration of this sort, where he would work off of someone else's vision for the project.

We started believing that all text should come from Haley's interviews, and that even though we have complete freedom in manipulating them, it should be bound to that text. We thought that there was a singularity in obsession for her -the day would be repeated, for instance. What we found was that as we deviated from Haley's particular story into the realm of dream and nightmare, the text has to shift as well. Chris would provide manipulations of text and suggestions of text. We would try them out with song, and then send back possible corrections and ideas to develop further. Having a writer based who was across the country was both incredibly frustrating and freeing! I'm not sure if I would do it like that ever again.

In addition, it is a difficult task to write music without lyrics, and lyrics without music. I understand why there are so many composer/lyricists, because it really is trying to write simultaneously when the roles are divided between two individuals. The

collaboration was a continual back and forth - sometimes it felt like it was going nowhere, but in hindsight, it was clear we needed to eliminate some possibilities in order to find what we were really going for.

Composer: Jon Bernstein

When I told sound designer Jon Bernstein that we might be building a music theatre piece off an opera singer, he responded, "I want to write for an opera singer." He knew that this was a major shift from sound design of a play that would be written to a new, completely scored music theatre piece that didn't exist just yet and was game enough to do it. Jon has written several albums of industrial/electronic music. This was going to be a huge leap for him as it would be for all of us. However, there is something about Jon that defies all limitations. He's not only one of the most eclectic people I know, but is highly intelligent and interested in the world. If there's anyone to leap into the abyss with, it's Jon Bernstein.

Jon was very much involved in the structure of Wake. We would have team discussions on grief and guilt, and it was Jon's idea that there should be a moment where one believes everything has gone back to the way it was before. To return to when one was not guilty - to be able to feel completely free from the burden of responsibility and feel clean again, only to be hit with the reality once again. Jon was very involved in how the structure of the piece came about, and would provide solutions for dramatic structure.

Musically, it was a difficult process because we were working from opposites. At

some point, I would describe Wake as "Verdi meets Portishead". This was not altogether off base. We were making a new sound that none of us had heard before. This was really done with great respect between Jon and Marnie, who were coming from opposite ends of the spectrum. We would start with the landscapes - forest, desert, underwater. We would sit together and listen to tracks that Jon had made or pulled from previous works. We would sometimes have text from Christopher, and Marnie might try to sound out a melody. After taping the trials, Jon would go and try to make a song from the improvisations.

This was a wonderful and frustrating process. It was exhilarating when you heard something that made all the sense in the world coming from improvisations. It was also exhausting and terrifying when we would have 3 versions of a song which would completely change how the scene was staged, and we were going to open in a week and a half.

Jon really wanted a full orchestra, or at least a string quartet. Due to budgetary and time concerns, we ended up with 3 musicians on stage. At the end of it, it all worked out in a way that made dramaturgical and musical sense.

Performer & Vocal Line Composer: Marnie Breckenridge

It's a very different process to work with someone when you are building something for them, then when they are cast for a role. With Marnie Breckenridge, the possibilities for what we could have made were limitless. Her life experience, soul, and

craft are so expansive that there really could be many performances made from her story and outlook. We've known each other for around ten years, but have never had the opportunity to work together. After seeing my work in NYC, we reconnected and she asked me to work on something with her. We began talks one year ago, but it was mostly on her dissatisfaction with the traditional opera world, and the roles that she was "allowed" to play. She clearly wanted more challenges, even though she was humbled by great music and epic stories. She was hungry for something that really represented the life she led, the struggles she faced, and that was closer to her philosophy. In this, I was a kindred soul, and we spoke at length about our values and what we believe in. These conversations built the line of communication and helped me understand how to work with her.

Marnie and I came from the same religious background, and we both went to the same Seventh Day Adventist institution for college, though not at the same time. Yet, through the years, we've both found that the spiritual path we desired was not found in organized religions and institutions. Ultimately, this became the central pillar of Wake, though we didn't know that at the beginning. She was hesitant about the subject matter at first as she was then a mother of two, and felt it unbearable to consider herself going through what Haley did. As we continued to build the piece, we found much resonance in our lives to the subject matter, and I can honestly say that it's so rare to have found a collaborator with such a like mind and soul.

I would consult her on everything, especially the events of the play, but also on

the details. While she is not a writer, there were ideas to the text that she would contribute, and her instincts were always right. As the vocal line composer, she would improvise these amazing lines on the spot, all the while, analyzing and breaking apart what she was figuring out. I learned so much about melody expressing a text from Marnie.

In the rehearsal room, I involved her with some ensemble training, which even though she was new to, she took to it and really gave everything to the process, especially that which was unfamiliar. We worked with the ensemble using viewpoints, and other movement trainings, and she was thrilled to learn new language for performance. When it came to music rehearsals, I pretty much left her and Jon alone, every so often giving a suggestion on a vocal line change. One of the things we talked about in our post mortem was the amount of freedom I gave her to run with, and that she felt like she did her best work because of that.

With Marnie, I really found the way I love to work with performers best. I am not the kind of director who wants to give the performers all their blocking and beats, but prefer to build a strange world in which they can find familiar issues to wrestle with and come to terms in a new perspective. By allowing them lots of freedom, they also take much more responsibility.

Set Designer: Melpomene Katakalos

Melpomene Katakalos is the set designer that I worked with in San Francisco for

my first professional show, *Porcelain*. She worked on *19* until she had to pull out because of her father's demise. We had been planning to work on my thesis together since I got into Columbia. She responded to the change by saying, "Sure. What else will I be doing?" As a professor at Lehigh University and a prolific designer on both coasts, there is a lot more that she could and would be doing. Mellie is truly one of the people who I will always want on my team for her unabashed honesty and loyalty. This, coupled with fearlessness and calm, make for one of my favorite people on earth.

Mellie had to start designing with only half of the show written. We had no idea how to accomplish the last few events, or even what they would be, and at the first production meeting, I placed her in the situation where she had to describe her set to the production team without knowing how the show would end. This is not a place I would ever like to place a designer in again, especially if the production team is not used to working on devised pieces that allow for this kind of process.

With Mellie, I am able to speak of things in a very metaphorical way, and she is able to translate that into a physical world. She also doesn't mind when I have strong ideas about what the set should be, and is able to help me articulate what the stage picture is through questions and collages. We work by pointing at images and talking about what works for us and what doesn't. She's immensely smart and able to create off of abstract and concrete prompts, and best of all, doesn't mind working without a script. What collaborations like this do most of all is build enormous trust between artists. The next project we worked together on, *Labyrinth* for the Beijing Festival, I called her and said,

"We're gonna make a show without actors, you ready?" Again, without knowing anything else, she said yes.

Cast

Much like the design and writing team, it is important how to pick the cast. For me, it is the people that come first. They are where the inspiration happens. I am less interested in holding auditions for a play, and trying to find the right person to represent something on the page or in my mind - I'm more interested in finding people to build together a vision that they have the capacity and interest to contribute to. In the case of Wake, Marnie Breckenridge was the first and only cast member until early February. We weren't quite sure who else would end up as characters, so it took a while longer to cast the rest of the team.

In a similar way that I invited the designers onboard, I also invited people to participate. I chose performers who were deep souls, engaged in big questions and who would be interested in making this piece with us. It is telling that from the 5 women I cast as goddesses, one of them became the mask maker (Jess Adams) and another the assistant director (Monica Santana) - because those were the roles most necessary that we needed them to fill. I've never really experienced that kind of shift before, even in a company setting. The generosity of those two women in how they wanted to contribute will always remain with me.

Megan Hanley was cast because I knew she would have no problem getting nude.

It was only an inkling and a possibility that we would require nudity, so perhaps it was also because she is whipper smart, wonderful to be around, and I trust her to come through and take charge when the need arises. She is also a deviser, understands the language of viewpoints, Suzuki and composition, and I have a short form with her because of similar training and mindset.

Wei Yi Lin was already cast from when I was going to be working on Liao Yiwu's prison memoir. She and Edward Chin Lyn were already going to be in that former thesis, and it worked beautifully for both of them to work on Wake. Wei Yi has incredible physical skills. She was my Nina in *The Seagull*, and is extraordinary in creating physical language from the barest of prompts. Edward Chin Lyn was the first person I thought of when I was trying to cast the Father/Horse. When his father came to the show, he asked me why I cast Edward, and if the real father was Asian. I told him that the real father wasn't, but that I was casting Edward's spirit. He's calm, steady, and strong. Despite the lack of movement training that I would have liked in the Horse, Edward came through at the end with the most beautiful eulogy that he wrote, and delivered it with such gentleness.

Yanghee Lee is one of my favorite choreographers working today. She's a gorgeous dancer, with a phenomenal sense of how to tell story with the body. I didn't realize I needed a choreographer until I saw her working in Ellen Lauren's rehearsals for *Ipigenia and Other Daughters* that I was the assistant on. She came on board and wanted to perform as well, which worked out perfectly to have three of the mother daemons.

This was how we worked together. I would describe what the scene should feel like, and then she would have the others create their gestures, which she would then weave into a sequence. I would ask her to create freely, with some guidelines of what was necessary (the death needs to happen here, but only after the choking). We would work back and forth like this - she would offer up some choreography, and I would shape it to what the rest of the piece needed.

In a similar way, I was at a Prototype show and saw a flutist playing in the pit on the side. I remember thinking that I wished musicians could be more incorporated into staging, and then started to wonder if that would be an effective choice for Wake. When I realized it was Margaret Lancaster, who is also an actress, I went up to her and asked if she would like to work on this show with me. Then I asked Jon what other musicians he would want on stage, and proceeded to invite Mari Yamamoto (violin) and Alex Dreyshner (percussion) to join the team. Jon had music written for the scenes, and he invited them to write their own solos, assisting when necessary to make choices on melody and rhythm. They would improvise, get ideas and feedback, and then go away to work on it themselves. We'd then try it again with Marnie and the others, to see how it worked in timing and in space. Ultimately, I'm not sure we found all the possibilities that we could in the presence of the musicians on stage. It is something I would like to develop in the future.

The ensemble at the end was chosen as well, based on how they interacted with

the world and their engagement in it. I attempted to have a diverse group, and didn't really succeed in diversity of age. However, in terms of languages and countries, we had an abundance of sounds and representation from all over the world. Here are some of the places represented: Mexico, New Zealand, U.S.A, Hawaii, South Africa, Turkey, Columbia, Greece, China, Korea, and France.

The first rehearsal for Wake happened in early February, and was a thrilling, moving experience. I asked each person there to explain who they were, why they were here, and offer up one-two minutes of what they do (which may or may not be related to the play). The group of thirty people who were there brought so much insight into the work, and their profound reasons for why they were there. It ranged from a social activist standpoint, to the need to purge their own guilt for a death in the family, and on and on. The things they chose to share of what they do were also incredible, and created a wonderful platform for mutual respect for everyone in the room. It was also very humbling, the immense talent that was there, and the knowledge that I had gathered these people on a vision that might very well fail because of lack of time.

What the first rehearsal set up was a non-hierarchy in the space. Each person had a great deal to offer and were free to speak up during the process. It made the rehearsal room a safe space where each person defined themselves on their own terms. I would try to find as many of those practices as possible throughout in order to encourage people to lead in their own portions.

For the last part of the show, I asked everyone, from the mother daemons to the ensemble, to collaborate on the text that they would speak. I gave them the medical record, and asked them to pick words from it to incorporate into their own expressions of suffering. By doing this, we see how the suffering of the child is also a metaphor for the suffering for the world. It became a timeless and massive eulogy.

Thus, through radical collaboration, through comradery and serendipity, the play emerged, so did the performers and crew, who took ownership and gave of themselves in total involvement. I was blessed to be a part of this.

CHAPTER FOUR:

How Audiences Relate to the Work

*Definition 3: **Wake** [weyk], n*
A watch or vigil over the dead.
A ceremony, ritual to mourn our loss.

By the time we got to the opening of *Wake*, it became clear what we were making. We were staging a metaphysical funeral - not only of the child, but of the self - the ego that is standing in the way. Hopefully, this would, like a funeral, inspire awakening from the evidence of impermanence and swiftness of life passing. As we were creating *Wake*, each of us in the writing/creative team went through a process of deep reflection. Jon and Marnie in particular, would let me know how this material was affecting them, and the depression it was causing. I understood. It was the Gorgon effect at play - facing the horror of Medusa. For us, the makers, we have been grateful for the opportunity to navigate the belly of this beast. We hope that the audience relationship to this piece was as profound as our own.

Audience Within

The audience is invited to be inside the event of guilt and grief, and the process of moving from guilt to grief to forgiveness. This is an intensely personal and epic space that is unique to each individual. The walls won't look alike, or be made of the same material.

By the ways we worked with time and space, we wanted to provide a meditative space for the audience. This is not a plot driven performance where the events will spur the action on. It is a slow, long take, with periods of openness, a space to reflect within. The audience is invited to fill that space, bringing into it their own experiences of guilt and grief, and the questions of how they would handle a similar situation.

Wake also serves as a mirror in different ways. There is the mirror of the typical morning in the beginning, and then also at the end with the finale of the ensemble. At some point, we were thinking of using live feed to do this - that the audience themselves will be seen in the screen. We also thought about how to articulate that with the ensemble, and we did so with their clothing, putting them in opposition with the clothing of the musicians and the mother daemons.

Mostly, we wanted to invite the audience into a vigil - a place where through our own awakesness we might also grieve together, not just for the child, but for all of our suffering. To sit together and remember the names of those who should not be forgotten. Throughout this entire process of making Wake, the one name that we never forgot was Maddison. More than the story of Haley, this piece always returned to the suffering of an innocent. This was the thing that should never have happened, and yet something we must face to deal with the question - Why?

Audience Reaction

It's hard sometimes to decipher audience response when one is the director. Often, people won't tell you what they really thought. In this case, people were often speechless, and when they would find me, hugged me and wept. I had an audience member, two months after the show, cried in my arms because of what it brought up in her again. There were others who wanted to know more about the husband and wife relationship, which just let me know who to sharpen the piece dramaturgically. Robert Woodruff told me that he thought this was the best use of a thesis he'd seen. He talked about how he's not sure if directing a classic play for a thesis did anything to add to the culture but, he said, "You made something new." On the whole, it was clearly Marnie Breckenridge's tour de force performance and Jon Bernstein's music that moved people deeply. I am honored to have been a part of their work.

CONCLUSION:

The questioning is the ritual in itself. I make theatre in order to bring these questions to flesh and blood, and for them to have a life outside of my mind, my collaborators and the mind of the audience. Does this questioning do anything at all? Is it at all useful? In Tom Driver's *Liberating Rites* (p.93), he writes, "*Rituals are primarily instruments designed to change a situation. They are more like washing machines than books.*" Can these questions actually change a situation?

Weingarten won a Pulitzer for *Fatal Distraction*. Still, having set out to save babies with his story, he feels in some ways that he has failed. There are limits to what journalists can accomplish, no matter how exquisitely they write or how many awards they may deservedly receive. The bottom line is: kids keep dying in hot cars at the same rates they did before his article. In response to this, he said: "I guess we're naïve, us journalists. We want to change the world. When we don't, it bugs us. It bugs me. It bugs me a lot."

I often have that same feeling as a theatre artist. I too, naïvely, want to change the world. However, changing the world through art is often immeasurable. Though Weingarten's article didn't nationally reduce the amount of babies who died, he might have educated more parents who took more precautions and saved other lives. He helped Haley understand she was not alone. He gave me insight into humanity. He might have saved himself. You never know whom you save.

The origin of the word wake comes from the old Norse: vaka, a hole or opening in ice. Our daily lives are like ice - making us numb through ignorance and despair. Perhaps the best we can do is make a small crack, even if it's only within ourselves.

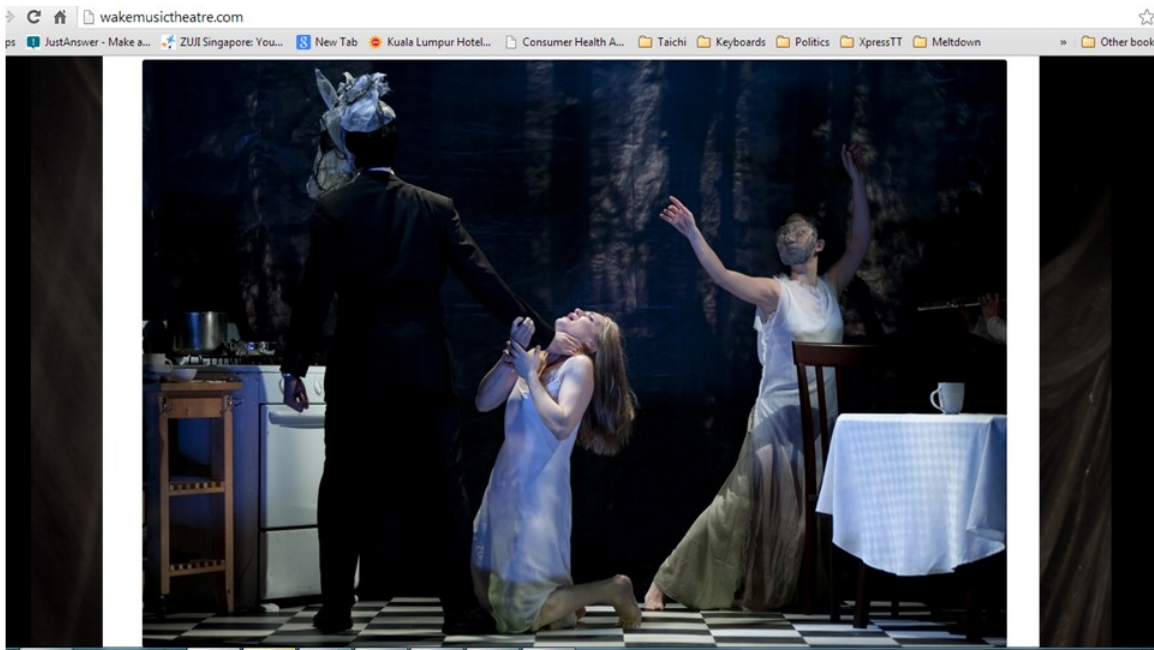
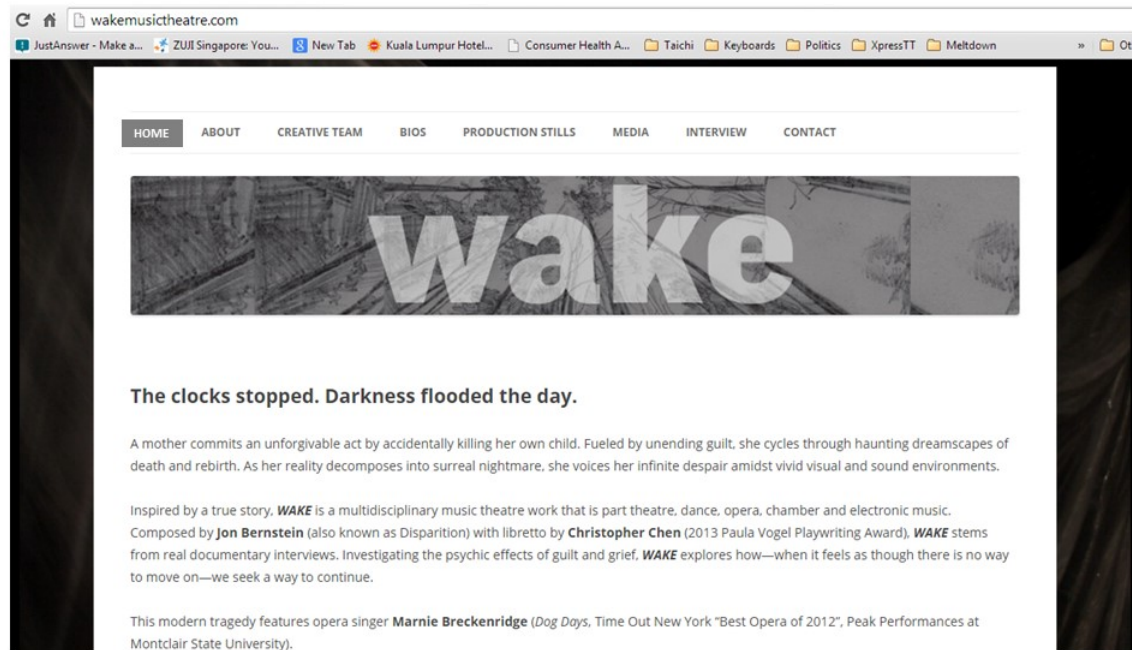
"Ring the bells that still can ring, forget your perfect offering.

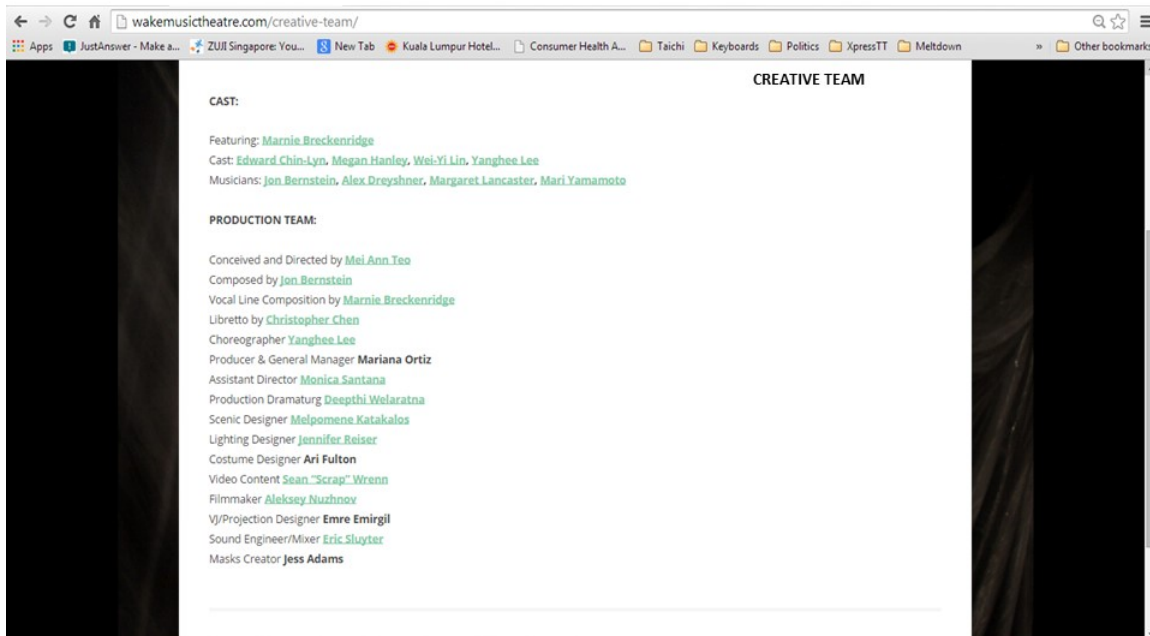
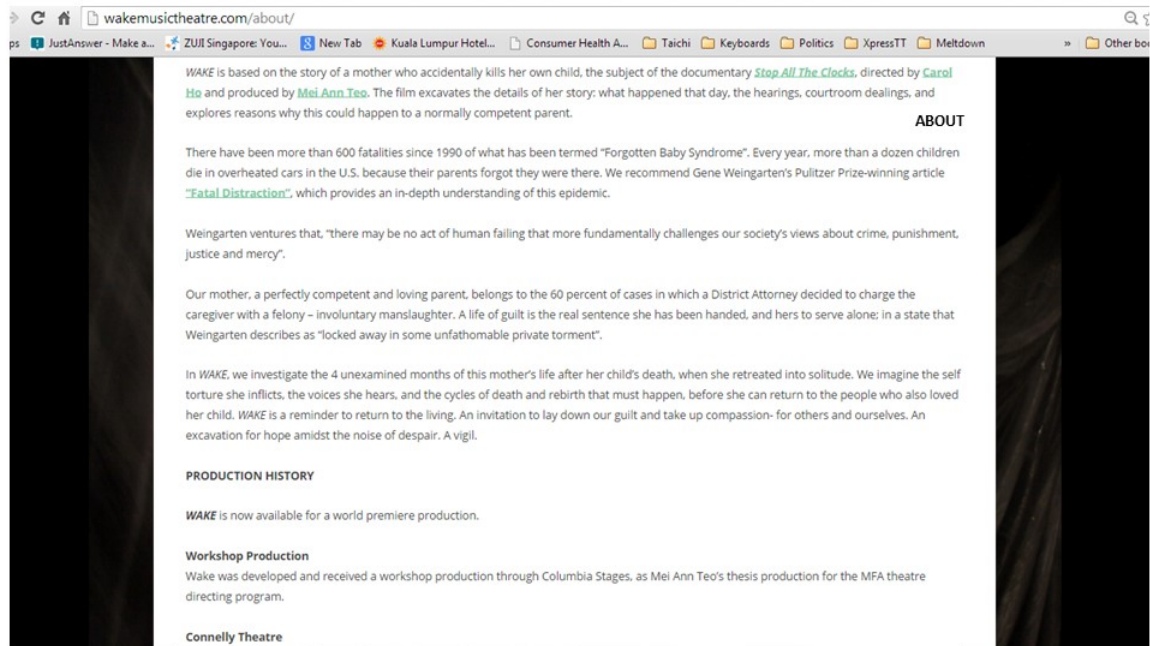
There is a crack in everything, that's where the light gets in."

- Leonard Cohen

APPENDIX

WAKE THEATRE WEBSITE





wakemusictheatre.com/bios/

Mei Ann Teo - Conceiver & Director

Mei Ann Teo is a Singaporean theatre/film director based in New York and working internationally. Deemed "stunning" by *The Scotsman* (Middleflight), and "truly polished, meaningful and entertaining" by *The New York Times* (Lyrics from Lockdown), her work has toured the US and at festivals worldwide including the Shanghai International Experimental Theatre Festival, Belgium's Festival De Liege, and the Montreal World Film Festival. For seven years, she helmed a drama minor program at Pacific Union College that focused on original ensemble creation. She continues this work, rooted in personal and communal history, in factories, universities, and remote villages in China. www.meiannteo.com

Marnie Breckenridge - Vocal Line Composition & Featured Performer

Soprano Marnie Breckenridge's versatility of roles range from highly acclaimed performances of Lucia di Lammermoor to Emily in Rorem's "Our Town." A champion of contemporary music, she recently sang the Mother in the world premiere of "Dog Days" by David T. Little at Peak Performances, which was voted best Opera Performance In New York for 2012 in *TimeOut Magazine*. Sierra Maria in Peter Eötvös's "Love and Other Demons" at Glydebourne Festival Opera, La Princesse in Philip Glass's "Orpheus" with and Margarita Xirgu in Górgon's "Ainadamar" with Opera Parallèle, her Ravinia Festival debut in Jake Heggie's "To Hell and Back" with Philharmonia Baroque, co-starring Patti LuPone, and her Berkeley Symphony debut in Chin's "Cantantrix Soprana" with Kent Nagano. She has regularly performed under the baton of Lorin Maazel as Lucia in Britten's "Rape of Lucretia" at his Castleon Foundation and on tour. Breckenridge is a featured soloist on the 2012 New World Records album of Victor Herbert songs and recently made her European and Asian debuts as Cunegonde in "Candide" with the English National Opera, Prague State Opera on tour in Japan where her performances were reviewed as "note perfect" (*Prague Post*) and "simply terrific" (*Opera Magazine*, UK).

Christopher Chen - Librettist

Christopher Chen's plays have been produced and developed across the United States and abroad. He is the 2013 recipient of the Paula Vogel Playwriting Award and is in residence at the Vineyard Theatre. Other honors include the Glickman Award, the Rella Lossy Playwriting Award, shortlist for the James Tait Black Award and 2nd Place in the Belarus Free Theater Playwriting Award. Chris is a graduate of U.C. Berkeley and holds an M.F.A. in playwriting from S.F. State.

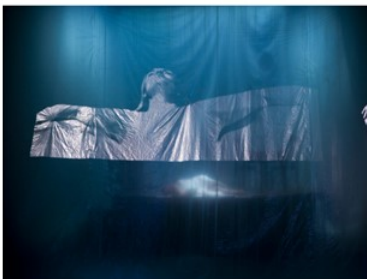
Jon Bernstein - Composer

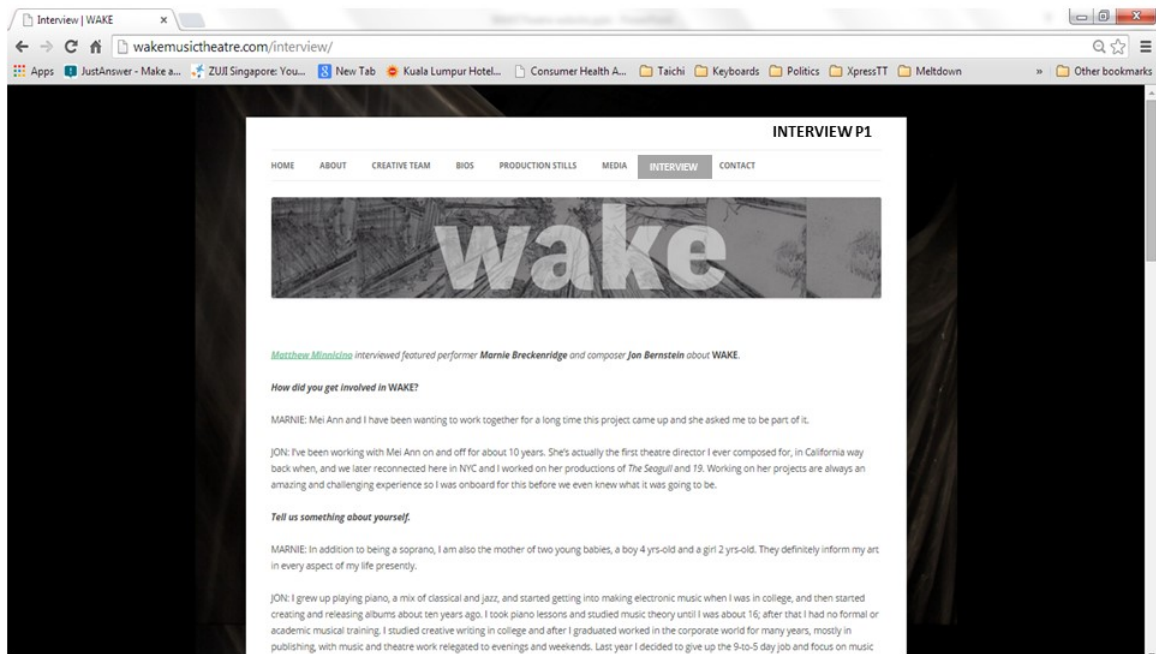
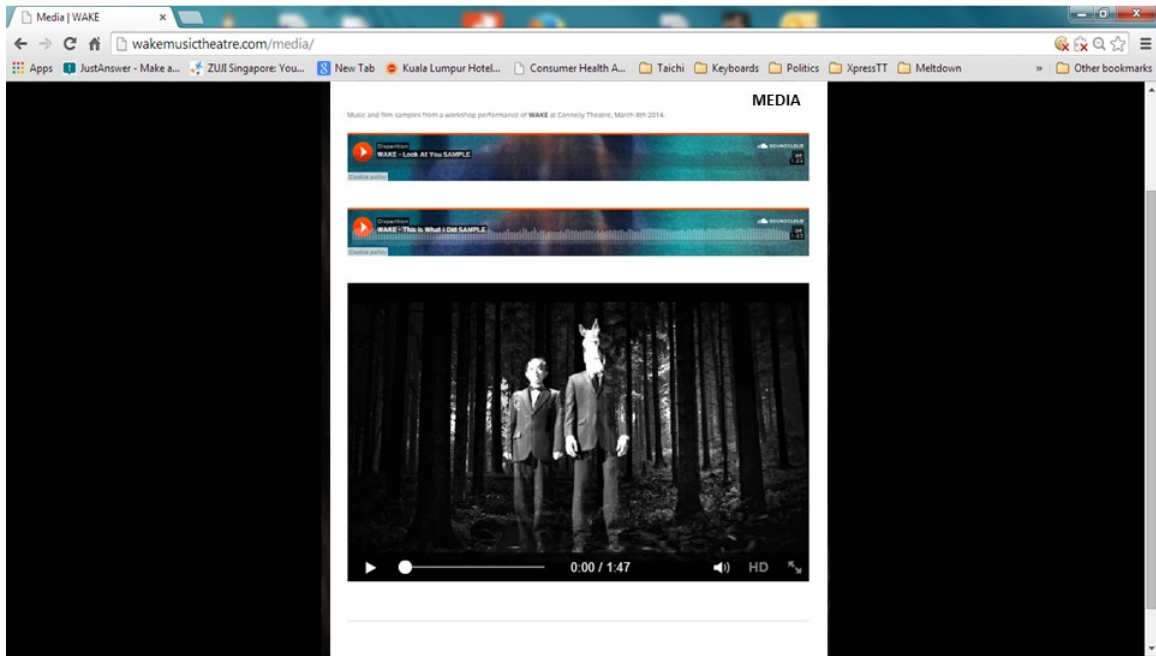
Jon Bernstein is a Brooklyn based composer and sound designer. Recent NYC theatre includes *The Downtown Loop*, *You Didn't See Her Alone*, *I9, I'm Pretty Fucked Up* or *the Howb* and *Sounds Play*, *Borking Girl*. Other recent projects include the soundtrack and live arrangements for *Welcome to Night Vole*, and original ambient and electronic albums released as *Disparation*. For more info see <http://disparation.info>

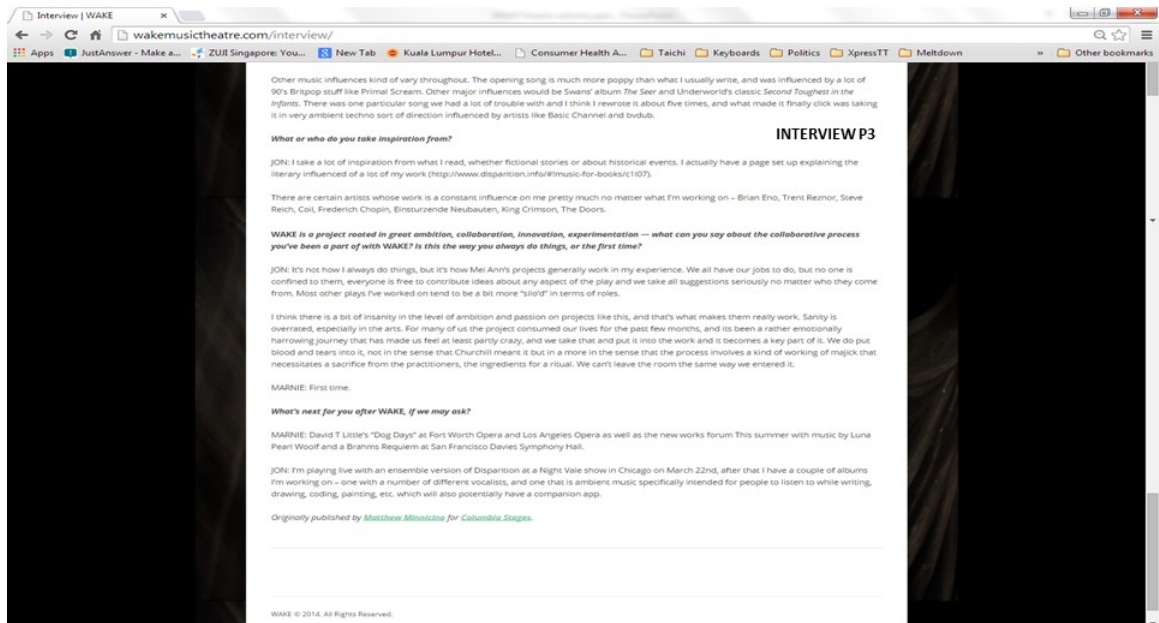
Yanghee Lee - Choreographer

Born in Korea, Lee lives and works as a choreographer and theatre artist in New York. She had trained Korean traditional dance from very youth. In 1997, she created *The Limbo* and joined the independent cultural art scene in Korea. As one of the pioneers of independent cultural dance movements in Seoul, *The Limbo* has participated in multidisciplinary, experimental performing arts and collaborative projects with various interdisciplinary artists. Lee was a resident artist at the 2009-10 Cave Share Residency, *The Field's Emerging AIR* and 13' Spring Residency, '09 International program at Watermill Center with Robert Wilson, and worked with Phil Soltanoff, Douglas Dunn, Carlos Arnesto, SITI Company, and many others. Lee has performed in the U.S., including the DUMBO Dance Festival, Dance Theater Workshop, Kitchen, La MaMa, Dixon Place, LMCC's Stetline2010, Watermill Center, BAM Fisher, and Barrow Theater. Lee received her main dance education from New York University. She was the 2011-2012 Fresh Tracks Artist of the New York Live Arts (Dance Theater Workshop) and a recipient of the Arts Council Korea Fellowship (Korea, '11-12).

PRODUCTION STILLS 1 TO 6







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